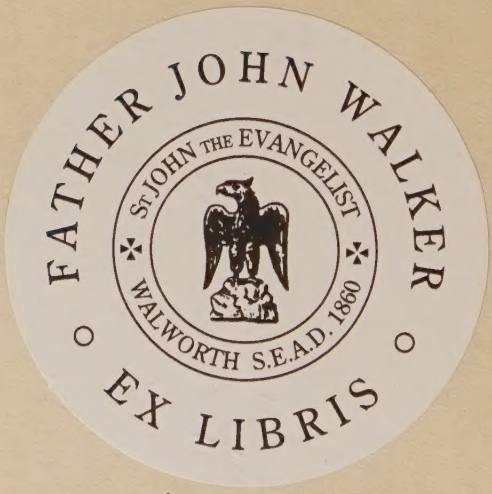
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RESTORATION TO THE SACRED HEART

BY

MOTHER ELIZABETH
of the Order of St. Elizabeth of Hungary

AUTHOR OF

"The Vocation of the Soul," "Into the Deep,"
"Letting Down the Nets," "Dawn of Vocation," etc.

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To

MY DEAR DAUGHTERS IN CHRIST

WHO HAVE RESPONDED

IN LOVE AND COURAGE

TO THE UPWARD CALL OF GRACE

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

FEAST OF ST. FAITH, 1918

FOREWORD

One of the marvels of Christianity is that it offers complete restoration to every soul that seriously desires it. Other religions ignore the oppression of the soul, or attempt to drown it by a copious draught of sensual pleasure. It is on this ground that the great religions which have obtained sway over the human soul must be chiefly tested. Can they provide a complete restoration for the soul out of every tribulation which can oppress it, or can they not? Christianity boldly accepts the challenge, recognizes its truth, and emphatically answers that it can deliver the soul from every oppression that can beset it; if only the soul will trust herself completely to the spiritual operations which she proposes, she will accomplish this marvel, and the soul will joyfully acknowledge this promise to be true directly she makes the great surrender, and delivers herself completely over to the tender embrace of our holy Religion.

All types of Christianity put forward this promise and undertake to fulfil it, but the historic faith of the Church most completely accomplishes this marvel. The following pages describe with singular fulness,

and delicate attractiveness, the spiritual process which results in a complete transformation of the soul from sorrow to joy, through the sacred ministry which the Redeemer has enshrined in His Church on earth.

WILLOUGHBY CARTER.

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CHAPTER I

RESTORATION TO LOVE

"And now in some measure hath mercy been shewed unto us from Thee, O Lord, that there should be left us a root and a name in the place of Thy sanctuary."

1 Esdras viii. 78.

Why does the thought of Penitence so often produce in us a sense of depression? Indeed it is not to be marvelled at if we only regard it in the light of self-examination, for the analysis of our sins alone has nothing in it to inspire us with any especial joy. Neither is self-examination in itself able to deliver us from the power of the shortcomings which we most earnestly deplore. We need to look upon the whole subject from the advantage of a higher plane—to look upon sin as it affects our relationship to God; and not only that, but to realise more deeply also what the heritage is from which sin would cast us out. Fresh from the realisation of what might be, we may look again upon the sorry state of soul in which we live, and seek to leave behind that condition of failure, and to attain more effectually to that which God destined for us when He caused us to be bathed in the waters of baptism, and gave us the gift of His Grace.

What, after all, is sin? We may take it in one aspect as all that separates us from love—notably the love of God. This thought will lift us up at

once into a higher plane, and as we concentrate our thoughts more upon the realm of love from which sin shuts us out, we may realise something of the effort which Love would make to draw us back again into its centre and under its control.

Sin separates from love ; we see this illustrated through all conscious creation. The knowledge of wrong-doing gives birth to a feeling of estrangement from the one we have injured. Our natural instinct, then, is to hide ourselves away, or at least to avoid the one we have sinned against. As long as we are unwilling to acknowledge our fault this instinct of avoidance controls us. We may be brought to the confession of our fault through compulsion, or by our own appreciation of its necessity, if we are in some measure seeking amendment ; but before we have admitted the fault we are always conscious that we have for the time being cut ourselves away from the environment of love. If we read from the pages of our life's experience we shall realise it has always been so from our earliest years, only we study too little in that wonderful book of our soul's history.

When we were little children our sense of right and wrong was so much more vivid ; we were fresh from the waters of baptism, and our innocence was still more or less preserved : therefore being purer in heart we could see God more clearly, whether in His own personality or revealed to us in the world around. We discerned evil, moreover, more clearly too, all which was not of love, and all that tended to destroy the action of love. Our more sensitive hearts were keen to grieve over all defects from grace, and the true happiness of our souls.

If, however, we have forgotten more or less our early experience—although few will find upon reflection that they really have—we may follow the example of the Divine Teacher and set a little child in our midst. In the clear depths of a child's soul we may read the deep lessons of purity and true insight into right and wrong. We lose so much in our intercourse with children by attempting to talk down to that which we consider the child's level: it is not by such means that their love and respect is won, and unless we inspire love and respect they will not open out to us the clear purity and insight of their minds and trust us with their confidence. If we talk to them as though we recognised the light of God within their souls, and let them realise that they have thoughts worth listening to, we shall often be amazed to find what depths of wisdom are revealed, and how clear their perception is of right and wrong, of truth, of justice, and how high is their ideal of human life and conduct.

Now when we lift all this up into the thought of our relationship to God we realise in our own experience how true it is. We are children in His sight; we have transgressed against the love of God, and conscious of the result, we hide ourselves way in shame, as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We realise also that the sense of alienation is our own fault, our own most grievous fault. God has not turned His face from us; we have departed from Him. Our Lord looked upon Peter; what would have been the effect had he at once cast himself at the feet of his blessed Master? But no; he went away and wept bitterly. But it was not Jesus that turned from him. So our souls

depart into solitude and darkness in the very face of Divine love, even beneath the gaze of the Sacred Eyes. We have sinned against Love, and learn in our experience that we have broken that union which made us one with Love.

Now it is only in this view of sin that we can really know penitence, for there is no true penitence without love. It is absolutely impossible for a soul to feel real sorrow for wrong-doing unless they have loved the one whom they have wronged. They may be anxious to make amends from a sense of justice, or from conscious discomfort, which is often really mere loss of self-esteem, but such motives may be very far removed from penitence.

Humiliation also, how often that is mistaken for repentance! We have been satisfied with our expression of religion, our regularity in its observance, our rectitude of character, and then suddenly we have yielded to temptation, and our self-esteem has been rudely overthrown. We have suffered a very real interior humiliation, but that is not penitence; it is the mere wounding of our self-respect. Again, the fault which we might not have realised in our own interior consciousness has been observed by others, and their disapproval has caused us mortification. With a sharp sting of pain we realise that we appear to them less perfect than we had hoped. This is hard to bear; but there is of necessity no love in this, except self-love, and we suffer from the wound which self-love has incurred. We may also suffer acutely from remorse. Judas was tortured so immeasurably that he sought and effected his self-destruction. Remorse is the keen realisation of what the soul has forfeited by its own wrong deed,

and there is a pain in that which eats into the heart and is rightly likened unto fire ; but there is of necessity no love in such a pain, for it is occupied almost solely with itself and its own loss ; it is not grieved at the pain inflicted upon the object of its love.

Fear of punishment or discovery may cause great suffering in a soul, but self is still the centre ; and there is in it no relationship whatever to the penitence of love.

And so we may question ourselves in our distress, from what do we seek release ? As long as we desire only to free ourselves from the consequences of sin merely to bring back ease and comfort, there is little hope of any permanent good. Indeed, any assurance we gained of inward peace would be only false. Yet how many a Catholic in this state seeks comfort from Confession, although perhaps they find it not. They believe that the formal use of the Sacrament will bring them ease of mind ; but it is not so. God must let us suffer, until the suffering burns out the dross of merely selfish ends. The Sacrament, which was so pre-eminently designed to restore the soul to love, cannot avail for the mere restoration of our self-esteem. It can only operate effectually as a means of restoration to union with the Sacred Heart.

Let us take, however, for our great encouragement the knowledge that God is yearning to receive us back into union with Himself. If the separation is pain to us in any degree, it is of infinitely greater import to Him : even as His love is so gracious and merciful towards us.

It is surely the thought of wounded love which

must most quickly call forth in us the response of a true repentance. As we look upon Him whom we have pierced we see in those Sacred Wounds that which should produce in us the first impulse towards true repentance. There Love is set forth wounded by our action, bearing in those Wounds the aggravation of our individual sin. Here we must gaze, if we are ever to rise to the true motive for our grief ; and as we contemplate the Crucifixion we may lift in will our hearts to Him, and offer Him in desire the repentance we may not yet feel conscious of within.

" Lord, I feel no penitence ; my heart seems dead and cold ; but I long to be penitent, because of Thine exceeding Love for me. Create within my heart that which I do not yet experience—horror of sin because of Thine immeasurable Love, and because my sin prevents Thy Love from encompassing my soul. Restore me to Thy Sacred Heart, as I rise and come to Thee, forsaking all known sin and making now in will and deed all the amendment in my power. Him that cometh unto Thee, Thou wilt in no wise cast out.—O Lamb of God, I come."

CHAPTER II

RESTORATION TO GRACE

"He is of great mercy, for He multiplieth more and more mercies to them that are present, and that are past, and also to them which are to come."

2 Esdras vii. 66.

We must be very clear about the necessity for forsaking sin by definite action. We have not lost our free-will; we may still put forth the power to choose right just as definitely as we choose wrong. It is very usual to hear people say that they fear they have lost the power of will to do what they know to be right. That is not so, and it may be proved, if we realise that we are still exercising the power of free-will all day long in other matters, thereby proving that the ability to choose is not dead. How many times each day the choice is made for good or evil in divers matters! The real trouble is that often we have not definitely made up our minds to choose the good, not that we cannot; we are still hesitating in order that we may cling in some measure to the evil which we feel ourselves called upon to forsake.

Souls in this condition hang upon the fringe of religion, and strive to find comfort in compromise. This can never be. It will only add to the unsatisfactory condition in our souls, if we allow ourselves to go on in this state of compromise, resulting in

no resolution made and kept. How frequently we permit this in others under the mistaken impression that we are giving sympathy and aid. On the contrary, it will probably only prolong the state of indecision and weaken the efforts of the soul we truly desire to help. Directly there is a clear perception as to what is wrong, we should seek to be alone with God and to make our decision unbiased by human persuasion, and we should encourage no craving for spiritual stimulation, or morbid self-analysis in ourselves or in others. These only result in an increase of self-importance and self-love. Let us neither seek or give encouragement until the right choice has been made.

Meanwhile we may well dwell upon the mercy of God in patiently attracting the soul homewards to Himself. We see in that attraction the manifestation of the love of God, and none may dare to say that they are unconscious of the love of God so long as they feel within their souls any yearning after that which is good and right. That is an evidence in itself that God loves us, and that He is by His Spirit leading us to desire holiness, and the best and highest good. This continual attraction which God pours forth towards the soul is marvellous indeed in its patience and longsuffering. All our ingratitude cannot weary it, all our superficiality does not diminish it, unless we at last make ourselves actually incapable of feeling its power, through deadening our whole spiritual being beyond sensibility of any kind; then it is that the love of God is not withdrawn but that we have grieved the Spirit of God to our own destruction.

When we turn again to the action of the will in

freeing us from sin, we may ask, is Confession, actual auricular confession, really necessary? It is certainly the natural instinct of the human race. We teach our children so. We do not allow them to decide only in their own hearts whether they are sorry for wrong-doing without any acknowledgment of their faults. Do we not rather draw the child to our knee and say, "*Tell me what it is that you have done*"? Even so Joshua acted towards the older sinner Achan.[1] We are all children in the sight of God. Children also in relationship to the Church, and to those whom the writer of the Hebrews tells us are set over us in the Lord, and who watch for our souls as those who must give account.[2] We use auricular confession as the true and natural means of return to God, as the Church appointed it to be, in obedience to our Lord's own words;[3] but it follows also that in our wills we should forsake the sin which separated us from Him. To do otherwise would be to abuse the Sacrament, to put it altogether to a wrong end, simply using it in order to bring ease to our consciences with no definite intention of avoiding the same fault again; and it would thus only tend to foster a morbid introspection. Rightly used, it should be the first step in the escape of our souls from "*the snare of the fowler*," and it should lead on to very definite action of the will in forsaking that which we have expressed our intention to forsake. (*Vide* the words of the *Confiteor*. "For these and all my sins I am heartily sorry and *earnestly purpose amendment*.")

[1] Jos. vii. 19.
[2] Heb. xiii. 17.
[3] S. John xx. 23

Let us also guard our thoughts, which like Lot's wife, may look back upon the forsaken city. Any indulgence of thought, or regrets for the pleasures of sin, any self-pity for that which we have given up, or self-glorification for having given it up, would greatly injure the benefit of our confession, for that which is external only, cannot be sincere ; the mind must co-operate with the exterior act. So in thought we must realise that we have definitely stepped forth from sin, and that it cannot regain its power unless it is permitted re-entrance into the mind.

To this end we must see that the mind is sanctified by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. We must remember our Lord's warning in the parable of the house left empty. The mind must be occupied with holy things or the old enemies will return. We are always desiring something; unless our desires are directed towards good, we shall almost certainly desire evil. It is for this end St. Paul very especially tells us to dwell in thought upon that which is beautiful and holy. To be practical at this particular stage of our spiritual life we shall experience great benefit, not by dwelling upon the sin we have forsaken, but by dwelling in thought upon its contrary virtue, and making that our practical ideal. We resist the influence of poisons in the air by our possession of health. We possess this health within our souls by our renewed baptismal grace, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost at our Confirmation. The seeds of all the virtues are within our hearts, we may therefore rejoice in the happy labour of making them grow and bring forth fruit. The events of every day present to us the

environment for such a happy labour, whatever the weed extricated may have been, we may especially cultivate the virtue whose place it occupied, and thus prevent the return of the enemy.

Here we may question the advisability of urging souls too strongly to use the Sacrament of Penance ; nay, indeed to use the Sacraments at all unless we have ground for belief that there is a very definite desire of love within the heart. A certain simplicity in our instruction of little children is perhaps a different matter, we do not desire to develop them unduly, and they have a very clear perception, as we have already seen, of right and wrong, and a very clear realisation of God, which brings them to the Sacraments generally with a sweet, simple devotion enviable to an older mind ; especially if they have been taught to approach the Mysteries of God early enough before they have lost that most sweet innocence which is one of their chief graces. But when we consider the case of older souls, especially when they are " penitents " in the technical sense of the word, surely we need to guard the approach to the Sacraments from a mere formal use which may be prompted by the suggestion of those whom they revere, or who are in authority over them, but which may precede any real awakening of penitence or love within the soul.

To apply the word ' duty ' in this respect may tend to foster an inadequate view. Surely the reverent use of the Sacraments is not our duty so much as the privilege of grace. When we realise that the Sacraments are ours as the fruits of the Sacrifice of Love, that the new Birth, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, the cleansing of Absolution, the

giving of the Sacred Food all result from the outpourings of the Water and Blood from the Wound in the Sacred Heart of our Lord—the fruits of the Divine Sacrifice of Love—we must look upon the Sacramental pledges of that Love with wonderment and awe, and with an extreme humility in our approach. They should be to us the avenue of love whereby we may approach and enter into the Sacred Heart of our Lord.

If the soul is really to enter into the deeper meaning of penitence, there must also be the realisation of sin *in relationship to God*. We must "*look upon Him*" Whom we have pierced. If we have known the pain we have brought to any human soul by our wrong doing, it will be so much the easier to realise the wound to the Heart of God. It is necessary to contemplate the effect of evil external to our own self-injury ; and then we shall be drawn nearer to the attraction which love puts forth to draw us from our sin. It was thus with the Prodigal Son : he *began* to awaken to his need when he surveyed his wretched condition in mere self-pity ; but he passed on to remember his father, to hope in his love, and this led him to the true realisation of the nature of his sin. "*I have sinned against Heaven and before thee*"—a perfect confession, one of true perception, as well as true humiliation ; and it was this awakening to a penitence of love which led him in experience immeasurably beyond the self-righteousness of his elder brother.

There is, however, another difficulty which arises in many minds. They are conscious of their sin, but they are paralysed by the consciousness

that they do not *feel sorry*. "God seems so far away, I do not feel any religion at all"; "I am sure I do not love God." Thus it is so often expressed. The truth is that sin, or even unfaithfulness to the higher life, has caused this estrangement, and the soul is suffering from the effect of venial sin, if not from the death-blow of mortal sin itself. The unhappy thing, however, is that such souls often do not realise that they will not feel God near, nor care again for the privileges of religion until they very definitely forsake that sin, and make what amendment is possible. Their action must be inspired by their will, not by their feelings. "*I will arise*," said the Prodigal, "*and go to my father, and say*"—three positive actions prompted by the will, with no mention of feelings of any kind whatever. With the realisation of his own misery there was also the return to the father in a full recognition of their mutual relationship, and the fact that his fall had injured another besides himself. The consciousness of love will follow the return, not precede it. It is even as it is in physical sickness, we feel no interest, whilst ailing, in the life we once loved; but that returns with the return of health: we find fresh zest and joy in living after we are healed. So the soul restored to the Divine union quickly realises again the mutual joy of love; quickly regains all that it has lost, and may even experience a great increase of love by the deeper revelation of the Saviour's pardoning grace.

It is in these ways the soul realises the overcoming of evil with good. The darkness containing no goodness of itself, may yet serve to lead us to a fuller appreciation of the light. Who shall say

that sight restored to the blind is not even more precious than to one who has never lost it? Yet the blindness was not good, but the overcoming of it was; and so the victory over any form of ill leads us mysteriously into a higher experience than may belong to those who have gone smoothly on in their own self-righteousness. Failure has led the penitent beyond self-endeavours to attain to a greater realisation of the Grace of God and the power of the Saviour to uplift the soul to a share in His Resurrection Life. So His mission is ever to those who have felt the effects of sin. "*I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*"

And just as surely as the dawn dispels the darkness, so will love follow the forsaking of sin. Let us but return. The enemy will seek by all his power to keep us weighed down by the sense of our unworthiness and burdened with discouragement. He will either seek to persuade us that we have sinned beyond forgiveness, or he will suggest to us that we must *feel* better again before we can approach the avenues of grace. This does not contradict that which we were considering previously. Then we described the soul who was only suffering from the *discomfort* of failure or mortification, with no thought of other beside itself; now we are speaking of one who is feeling himself to be outside the heavenly city, longing to re-enter, yet doubting his ability to do so. No salvation will come as long as we remain in the far-off country—to which, we must remember, we took ourselves; we were never cast out. "*Him that cometh unto Me,*" by a definite act of the will, "*I will in no wise cast out.*" The consciousness of love is not given as a

condition of approach, but the definite turning to the Saviour ; which carries with it the turning away from that which has injured us in the past. We cannot return without leaving this past ; we cannot take our sin back with us to the Saviour ; He wants us, but He does not want our pride, our worldliness, or our self-pleasing. We must return naked, having cast aside the robes we have borrowed from the enemy. Then the mantle of love will be quickly thrown around us to cover us and to conceal our shame. We shall be given the spirit of praise instead of the garment of heaviness.

If we have still difficulty in realising the yearning in the Heart of God for our restoration, let us again look beyond our interior feeling of estrangement to certain facts of which we are at the same time conscious. Let us ask ourselves, " Do I desire to remain where I am ? I feel I cannot pray ; do I really wish I could pray ? If I could blot out the past failure, would I ? Do I in fact desire with my whole heart to return to God ? " We assuredly answer, " Yes, yes ; we do." We hate sin, and we do not wish to continue therein ; and in this fact lies the proof that the Spirit of God is still influencing our hearts and attracting us home to God. We could not hate sin and long after goodness if we were entirely separated from God as we feel ourselves to be. If we yearn after Him, deeply deploring our present condition, we may take courage, because it proves that God is still attracting us back to Himself in love.

Yea, even as a little child may stand apart, stricken and ashamed, yet upon raising its eyes to its mother, and perceiving her arms outstretched—

may hurl itself across the intervening space, and seek the shelter of her breast—so may we express our longing for the reunion of love. Let us lift up our eyes to our Father in Heaven, and realise that the love in His heart is reaching across the gulf created by our sin. He has bridged that gulf by the gifts of the Sacramental Life. It is by the response of our will, the action of our will, that we may grasp His Gifts for our own restoration, and sink in peace into the bosom of His Love.

CHAPTER III

RESTORATION TO THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE

"I am merciful, saith the Lord Almighty, . . . for My wells run over, and My grace shall not fail."

2 Esdras ii. 31, 32.

When the soul has thus consciously passed over from its guilt into the refuge of the Saviour's Heart, it has entered into the realm of love. Love is now active on the soul's behalf. It is what God is longing for whenever we are under the burden of any sin. He cannot act for us against the foe until our penitence has released us from its power; but directly we are ranged with Him against the enemy love is once more strong to act on our behalf.

So we come to understand that just as sin separates us from love, after repentance, love is once more active to separate us from sin.

It is at first active in three ways: in freeing us from the guilt of sin, in restoring within us the dignity of grace, and in protecting us from our spiritual foes. There are other evidences of the work of love which we will consider later.

With the first result we all by reason consent. Yes, we know God forgives us, but is our knowledge a merely intellectual assent rather than an experimental knowledge? How many, how very many, alas! bear the burden of their sin away

with them from the confessional, no gladder, no freer in spirit than they were before. Can such in any sense be said to really believe in the remission of sins? The reason is so evident because we are continually dwelling in thought upon ourselves, our failures, our weaknesses, rather than seeking to enter into the reality of God's pardon, and His great redemptive power.

A sin repented of is past and dead. It is rendered lifeless by the Sacrifice of Calvary; it died with Christ upon the Tree. How, then, can it weigh us down still? It cannot, it is our imagination solely that does so. Those who have lost a limb feel that member of their body as though it were still there; but they do not believe that it is, they know it is not. So the intelligent soul knows it is impossible to be burdened with a sin truly slain by faith in Christ's atonement, and it is grievous that it should continue in heaviness and despair. The Comfortable Words succeed the Absolution, and the *Sursum Corda* follows. Let us indeed "*Lift up our hearts,*" breathing the very atmosphere of Heaven as its fresh waves of love overflow the soul.

And the dignity of grace is restored. Yes, this is apart from the deeper work of sanctifying Grace, we will think of that later on. There is a right self-respect in the Spiritual being. That reverence for ourselves which comes from the consciousness that we are the objects of Christ's redemption, the recipients of the Gifts of God, the honoured children of the household of Faith. This conscious dignity is not due to any imagined worthiness in ourselves; it is solely the free gift

of Grace ; but nevertheless we must rise to the full appreciation of this work of Grace, and the Presence of the Divine Trinity at work within our souls ; and an attitude of cringing, or self-depreciation is dishonouring to God. Just as dishonouring as our neglect in believing He has freed us from our sins.

George Herbert beautifully expresses the thought in his poem.

> " What, Child, is the balance thine,
> Thine the poise and measure ?
> If I say ' Thou shalt be mine,'
> Finger not My Treasure.
> What the gains in having thee
> Do amount to only He
> Who for man was sold can see
> That transferred the account to Me."

This keener appreciation of the reverence due to ourselves as the objects of God's grace, will also be a safeguard from forming a low standard of conduct. We know this in purely human ways : *noblesse oblige*. A drunkard enabled to redeem his clean shirt from pawn, stated that it would be easier for him on that day to keep from drink : he felt the added self-respect cleanliness gave him, and at once desired to preserve it. So it is in purely spiritual ways, God raises us by His work within us, and our appreciation of His mercy should lend a dignity to all our conduct and be in itself a protection from entering into spheres of doubtfulness and temptation, in fact into circumstances which we should deem unworthy of any earthly distinction. All this leads us to realise how God protects the soul from its enemies. So many have

the dread that they will fall again at once under the enemy's power.

Because we so often think that it is our act alone which has made us give up what is wrong, and that we are, as it were, alone in bearing the fresh trials of temptation; we fall naturally again by the very weakness of fear. Let us once realise that by our return to God we are placing ourselves under His protection; arming ourselves with the armour of the all-conquering Saviour and are fortified by the indwelling might of the Holy Ghost, and we should, instead of fearing a fresh downfall, almost wonder how it would be possible for our souls to fall into sin again.

God intends this confidence to be ours, the Scriptures teem with assurances that we are "*strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man,*" and we may be full of joy and confidence, not in ourselves, God forbid! but in the supernatural environment we have entered by virtue of having used the Sacrament of Absolution in a joyful and courageous faith.

As we more and more realise all the working of Grace within our being we shall enter more into the understanding of St. John's words in 1 Epis. v. 4, "*Whatsoever is born of God sinneth not. . . .*" Truly while we are consciously dwelling within this realm of God's love and grace we cannot go forth to sin deliberately and grievously. We even feel the impossibility of such actions in the presence of some saintly soul on earth. The more we intelligently learn to dwell in thought upon the wonders of His Grace, the more can that Grace operate within to the growth of our Sanctification.

How often we are apt to express the conviction that were our environment more spiritual and in sympathy with our views, we should find it so much easier to be faithful to our religious ideals. Have we ever considered that our real environment is within the power of our own creation by the providence of God? Far nearer than any human circumstances is the realm of our own thoughts and consciousness; and were we really held in Communion with God and His Saints—with high and lofty ideals formed through meditation on the Holy Scriptures—we should create around us a sanctuary wherein the world could never penetrate, and in which we could abide in a continual atmosphere of holiness; and dwelling there we should be safe from the contamination of worldliness and low ideals.

Thus our own souls, the temples of the Holy Ghost, were destined to be the environment which would protect us from all danger without: temples, inhabited by heavenly visitants, enriched with holy thoughts, breathed upon by the very Spirit of God, the Shrine of the Body and Blood of Jesus; what need we further—be our outward circumstances what they may? It is not that we are set in surroundings deleterious to our spiritual welfare, it is that we have admitted the world to enter our inner Shrine, which should have been consecrated to God alone.

The realisation of God's gracious work within the soul will save us from the lamentable habit of using the Sacraments in mere formalism. There is nothing in clinging to exterior aids and forms which will cause the soul not to sin; nothing but

the new birth within, whether that birth is the fruit of Baptismal grace, or grace received in the Sacrament of Absolution.

Let us guard our hours of penitence jealously as far as possible from the inroads of social intercourse or business, in order that we may realise more deeply the wonder of God's dealing with the soul. With each absolution, if merited by a humble and sincere confession, a wondrous miracle is wrought within the soul, and all the plenitude of God's love and grace is active on its behalf; but with what astonishment must our Guardian Angel witness how soon we often forget—though doubtless he is conscious enough of how the forgetfulness is only part of our general lack of intelligence and vital faith in the working of the Sacramental Life.

Never in our haste to spread the Catholic Faith let us neglect the necessity for deep and vital teaching, especially in this great matter of penitence. There is a tendency in our midst to exult in the number of those who use the Sacrament of penitence: and rejoice as we count an increase before the great Festivals. We may well ask if this is the result of a really deeper and profounder knowledge of the mysteries of God, and His relationship to our souls; and not merely the result of human influence and persuasion.

There are some who, untrue to our English Church, make rules for their spiritual children of compulsory confession: but can they command compulsory repentance? Nay, surely that must ever be beyond their powers, yet without that the Sacrament is void, hence many bad confessions

are made, and a perfunctory use of such holy mysteries is acquired. True, the thought is often that it is a guarding of the sacredness of Communion, but is it not also placing too great a limit upon the effect of the Holy Food upon our souls? If the soul truly desires Communion before it is prepared for Confession, can we possibly prohibit its access? Surely we must trust and hope that a loving approach to the blessed Sacrament must assuredly deepen the earlier degrees of penitence within the soul, and that it may be led into the full privilege of all the Sacramental system if not turned back from Communion with our Lord.

All these are deep and great questions, and who is sufficient for these things? Nevertheless we shall be more safe if we concentrate upon the workings and privileges that love reveals, rather than on the discipline which is only safe and beautiful when meted out by love. Did we but dwell in the realm of love, we should be safe from so many errors; did we but realise that love is the real heart and centre of our religion, we should realise all its supernatural power of attraction both to our own souls and to those who are without.

One of the great attributes of love is its patience. Indeed is not that one of the first attributes by which love often attracts a wayward soul to itself? How often exhaustless patience has shamed a soul where no reproaches would; and how often we have known a sinner to be really touched at the realisation of God's patience, in renewed and ever freshly renewed opportunities vouchsafed.

Indeed it is so, *we* hurry, *God* waits; but it is God who wins where we lose. So often we do

indeed lose ground by what we call fervour in our zeal for the faith, which is really impetuosity. We would accomplish in a generation what God allows centuries to effect ; and yet, in spite of all, the Catholic Faith, the Supernatural Sacramental Life, lives, and triumphs—is almost hidden and then again revealed. All the time true hidden souls come to the reality in slow but sure degrees, and we do but hinder them when we seek to hasten that wonderful sanctification of God's elect, so surely and so truly drawn home at last to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

CHAPTER IV

RESTORATION TO LIGHT

"And now in some measure hath mercy been shewed unto us from Thee, O Lord, . . . to discover unto us a light in the house of the Lord our God."

1 Esdras 78, 79.

Faith in the absolution proclaimed by God's ambassador to the sincerely penitent soul, does not by any means denote that we are free also from all effects of sin. The more we grow in the knowledge of the wisdom of God, the more we shall realise that there is much to be learnt in the weakness and suffering which remain in many cases after the sin has been forgiven. It is by this suffering that we often come to perceive the seriousness of sin, and are brought to some knowledge of its tremendous effects, and the consequent wound it has inflicted upon the Sacred Heart.

Very often we expect to throw off all pain immediately upon our penitence. We are perplexed that the pain remains, and ask why—if we believe we are forgiven—does God allow us still to suffer? The reason is obvious, it is in order that we may "Rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things,"[1] in order that we may learn the painful lessons of wrong doing which, if they

[1] *In Memoriam.* Tennyson.

were altogether spared us, might result in a very inadequate conception of sin, and forgetfulness of the serious and direful effect upon the soul. We may repent our folly in burning a finger, but the pain of the burn remains and intensifies our desire to avoid such an experience again.

So let us not be impatient when, although we know ourselves to be forgiven, we yet feel a pain of distress which is in no sense lack of faith in God's forgiveness. We can of ourselves do nought to heal that pain; we can, however, accept it as our penance, and leave the length of its duration to the unfailing wisdom of God. He knows what pain will accomplish in us.

Its great characteristic is, however, that it is perfectly compatible with the consciousness of God's love. In our last meditation we deplored that heaviness of depression that even after absolution causes the soul to feel itself unforgiven, and burdened with the sense of being under condemnation; but in the pain we are now considering there need be nothing of that. We may be conscious all the time we are safe in the shelter of God's love, that we are fully forgiven and restored to grace, and that the pain is one borne in sympathy with the Sacred Heart, not estranging us from it.

If to our distress is added that highest form of suffering for sin granted only to those who are the real lovers of our blessed Lord—that intolerable grief caused by the realisation of having wounded Him—then our hatred of wrong doing will work within us a very definite eschewing of all questionable thoughts and deeds.

Even while we are suffering, the work of healing

is in progress. That commences with the touch of our Lord in His gift of absolution. Sometimes as we offer the suffering to our Lord, accepting it in loving penitence, glad to bear it in reparation, the sting of it so passes away that we may almost count it gone; but in any case such an offering will draw us nearer to our Beloved, and we shall know we are sharing in His suffering for sin, and may count it fellowship with Him, inasmuch as we know we are no longer identified with the sin, any more than a man who has died is identified with the diseases of the body which he has left behind.

It is by the suffering of these after effects of sin, we repeat, that God prepares us for His work of Sanctification. In all cases of healing our Lord seemed to require that the one affected should be conscious of his need. He probed the mind with questions: "*What wouldest thou that I should do unto thee?*" Not only was it our Lord's method in healing, but is it not also our own? In our dealing with children it is invariably our custom to bring home to the child, after its confession (which we always require), the nature of its sin, in order that it may come to understand. "What did you do?" "Why did you do it?"—and a reasonable child knows that it is in love we ask such questions, and not in any way in anger.

A confession of sin that is merely a perfunctory repetition of faults without any analysis of motive is worse than useless in arriving at self-knowledge. Hence arises that very common trouble in earnest people's minds which they express as making no progress in confession, but merely saying the same things time after time.

To be explicit, we may illustrate our meaning by such a sin as anger. We may confess, " I have been impatient many times." We may confess that every time, and be no nearer at the end of a year to arriving at the cause, and therefore preventing it from taking effect. Now there may be an immense number of different causes for such a fault ; and if we do not ascertain which of them is ours, we shall never know what we must try to avoid.

Why was I impatient ? It may be because I was engrossed in my own occupations and selfishly resented interruption ; or because my self-conceit was hurt by criticism ; or because I demanded a perfection of conduct in others that was unreasonable to expect ; or because I had set my mind on having my own way, and could not get it ; or because I was allowing myself to live a life of overstrain and my nervous system was proclaiming the effect. Each of these, and many others, might have been the cause, and it is necessary to ascertain in each case the right one, so that the remedy may be applied to guard against a repetition of the fault. To recapitulate, we may note what virtue we need to set against the fault and thus more profitably use our hour of meditation.

In the first case an unselfish desire to set aside our own interests for that of others will lead us to welcome interruptions ; and likewise a desire to overcome self-conceit may lead us to thank God for criticism, instead of impatiently resenting it. A humble estimation of our shortcomings will make us tolerant of others ; a perfect resignation of our will to God will make us patiently recognise

disappointments may be His appointments; and if we are suffering from overstrain we must recognise that a readjustment is an absolute necessity to avoid the destruction of our nerve control.

A wise general ascertains from what direction an enemy approaches, and he strengthens his forces where they are needed most. Such strategy may well be adapted towards our spiritual foes.

How necessary is sincerity in this close examination! Without that great virtue indeed all progress in self-knowledge is impossible. We must not hit the heads off our dandelions, but dig out their very roots! But this close investigation will take the useless formality—the endless repetition—out of our confessions; of which, in the past, we have often wearied; and all by the addition of that little word *because*. "I have sinned in untruthfulness, *because* I feared losing the good opinion of another." "I have been slothful, *because* I loved to indulge myself more than I loved to serve my neighbour." What light this throws on the condition of our hearts, and with what much greater hopefulness shall we go forward on the path to victory! We all know the relief when a doctor has diagnosed a feeling of general *malaise*, and we know what we have to combat: so it is with these enemies of our soul's health; we may, after recognising their nature, turn to the health-giving gifts of the blessed Spirit of God, and know what balm we may, by faith, lay upon our souls.

Self-knowledge is a study of gigantic magnitude: only as the soul advances does it become conscious of how vast a field it is. We must not hesitate for one moment, though, as to its value to

the soul. We must also remove it at once from the taint of scrupulosity or introspection. These are morbid and unreal. They may be detected by their indefiniteness and depressing effect upon the soul. We may be sure that where the Spirit of God is shedding light upon the soul, His voice will be definite and to the point: *we shall know what is wrong;* where there is only a depressing sense of having done the wrong thing, although we tried to do the right; when we are totally unable to say what is wrong at all, we may at once detect in such a state of mind the presence of the foe who loves to entangle a morbid soul in a fog of doubts and scruples.

To one who is really learning the truth about themselves under the searchlight of the Holy Spirit, there is courage given to advance with cheerfulness in this long road of learning. Cheerfulness, because every step in self-revelation marks a further relinquishing of wrong doing, and a consequent separation from sin. Those that are weak in love cannot progress here, for they have not the incentive to bear the present pain; but if we love God sincerely, *because* we love, we shall not hesitate to face the truth, and day by day an increasing gladness will be ours.

We pause here to realise the responsibility that rests with us in every advance in knowledge. God reveals in order to heal: He will never tolerate the evil to remain. How fine on this point are the words of Père Chocarne: "The love of a just God who pursues with His hate the least vestiges of evil in the soul; of a holy God, who will have nothing defiled in the Moses who is to ascend His holy

mountain; of a jealous God who will admit none to share His love. . . . Instead of waiting till the hand of death shall purify thee, tear aside the veil, and open heaven now; do in thyself each day the work of death, accomplish in thyself all justice by the sword of penance, etc." [1]

There is no advance in knowledge for the soul who dallies with the light already given. There is a habit too prevalent in our midst to dwell in conversation upon our faults, to use them, as is sometimes terribly the case, even to attract the interest of spiritual advisers in our condition. Perish the thought! One who acts like this has never seen sin in the light of God's countenance at all; and if we in any small degree have, we must set our faces very resolutely against that weakening of the whole moral nature such a course effects.

We have said the way to true self-knowledge is a long road: does it really extend all through our lives? Truly it must be so; but if we measure our growth in self-knowledge as a result of our increasing knowledge of God, it will make the study merely the complement of the contemplation of the Highest. Because our ideals are raised by increase in the knowledge of God, we naturally become more conscious of our own defects; but only in order that our faith may continually increase in the beneficent work of God within our soul: our path thus becomes "*a shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*" [2]

One principle we must ever keep in mind by which we shall understand the whole question of

[1] Vide *Inner Life of Père Lacordaire* (Washbourne).
[2] Prov. iv. 18.

our growth ; and that is, that self-love lies at the root of all sin. It is this enemy we always have to fight. We are accustomed to attribute our frequent falls to the work of a malignant foe, but we must realise he would have no power at all over us were it not for the self-love that weakens our defence and admits the enemy within. Satan *attacked* our Lord, but because there was no self-desire, no self-love, the enemy could find no place in the Sacred Soul where he could set his foot.

"*The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me.*" [1]

Therefore let us always remember that the work we have really to concentrate upon is the "Noughting of ourselves." [2] It is love which alone will cast out our self-love : and thus realised the battle becomes a simple duel. If we only in perfect simplicity yielded always to the love of God, in will and in deed, we should always overcome all sin ; but what an *if* is that ! How many times we draw back from self-surrender, we choose again to please ourselves, we indulge in self-pity at some passing trial ; and thus exalt our self-love into battle against the Divine. Nevertheless let us keep the end in view : our aim to love God best. There lies the goal, there, and there alone, lies the Secret of the Saints.

[1] St. John xiv. 30.
[2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, by the Lady Julian of Norwich.

CHAPTER V

RESTORATION TO HOLINESS

"Behold . . . those . . . which are departed from the shadow of the world, and have received glorious garments of the Lord"
2 ESDRAS ii. 38, 39.

As we set out more definitely to co-operate with God in the extermination of sin from our hearts, we are generally occupied at first with those faults which appear in our outward conduct. The fact that they bring us into conflict with our exterior surroundings and call forth criticism causes us discomfort, and tends to alienate others from us, at times, even, those whom we especially desire to help. Such faults become easy to discern; and it is well, because they must militate against the power of our influence in a consistent Christian life. Yet it is perhaps extraordinary to find how reluctant we are, even at the outset, to see that we are in the wrong. Pride creates within us a wall of defence, and leads us to persuade ourselves that others are mistaken in their criticisms. But just as smoke betokens fire, so criticism has generally some ground for its existence, although it may be exaggerated at times. We may do well to accustom ourselves to the habit of believing that others are right when they suggest possible defects in us. It will certainly do us no harm to give up the good opinion we hold

of ourselves, and to strive at least to see whether there is not illumination for us in the criticism which has been made.

At other times we are conscious enough that we are often wrong; then we must remember that such evident blemishes matter very much. Those who profess any degree of religion are expected to maintain a high standard of conduct in all things, and at times we may have thought this standard to be unjust and unreasonable; but when we come to consider, is it not the greatest possible compliment to our religion? There exists in the minds of almost all enlightened people, religious or otherwise, the conviction that a Christian was intended not only to believe a Creed but to live a life—and that the Christ life.

It is remarkable that this is unconsciously recognised on every hand. The adherents of other religions are regarded with some degree of interest on account of what they believe, the tenets of their faith arrest attention: but it is not so with the Christian, there it is that the life is first observed; and the consistent following of high ideals is the first object of remark.

This is really an immense homage to the Personality of our blessed Lord. Even His enemies recognise His beauty of character; and they judge His followers all unconsciously, as though they expected them to be precisely what Christ Himself intended them to be, the temples of the Living God, the witnesses now upon earth of the Christ life in a supernatural degree.

The world is not content that we should be as other men, if we profess to be the followers of

Christ; there is no defect in us which they will tolerate. It is here that we often make mistakes if we have been granted a calling which marks us apart from other men; we often endeavour, when mixing with our fellow-creatures, to be, as we express it, "one of themselves." It is precisely what they do not want us to be; they honour us, if they are upright men and women, for just those unworldly traits of conduct and judgment which mark the Christian ideal. What they ask of us is not like-mindedness with themselves, but a broad charity and width of judgment which will make us sympathetic, while we are true to our own ideals. The world wants to *look up* to the Christian man: men of the world are disappointed if they cannot: they do not want us to conceal our inward conviction, in order that we may appear to think and act and speak as the other people in the world.

We recall a painful evening when a priest spent some hours in the company of a straight, thoughtful, but very typical man of the day, who, whilst keen on every pursuit, made no sort of religious profession. The priest attempted all the evening to make himself popular with this young man, with the result that when he left, his listener arose, and throwing a cigarette into the fire, turned to another, and said, "I think nothing of the parson, he is a poor imitation of the average man of the world."

So a high ideal must be ours, and until it is ours we shall not attract those who are without. Do we seek conversions from such as these? They may look at us, and say, "What are we to be converted *to?*" What difference does this faith make between

their lives and ours? When we seek to heal the sorrows of the bereaved, do they see we have a really Christian attitude towards death? There are not many of us who meet its prospect with the joy and peace which our faith would inculcate. We have many of us not even attained to anything but a heathen manner of speech when we speak of the great transition. Again, as we speak to them of some sin which we desire them to overcome, do they see in us the victory over our own special shortcomings? The jarring note, caused by our bad temper, may greatly militate against the effect of our admonitions. The shady dishonesty in petty ways of a regular Church-goer is among the anomalies we have to face!

We must remember that such blindness to our practical shortcomings is precisely what the enemy is most anxious to encourage. It has often been stated as a difficulty that the lives of Christians are often no better than those who profess no religion; but have we ever considered that a person of moral respectability and natural kindness of disposition, unenlightened by faith, is one of the most useful weapons in the great enemy's hands? All the more so if such an one can be brought into contrast with a struggling tempted soul, full of defects, yet most genuinely striving to overcome such faults. We may recall the old legend which describes a whole host of the devil's agents closely encamped around a city which sheltered many holy souls, striving to gain an entrance; whilst where a city was given over to indifference only one demon tarried outside its walls, and he asleep! There is a natural goodness and a supernatural; and a soul

apart from Christ never attains to the latter, and the former will never accomplish the heroic virtue of a saint of God. If our ideals are so low that we never seek to realise within ourselves anything of the supernatural life, promised us by the indwelling power of our Lord, we shall certainly often be put to shame by the good and upright exponents of a merely human ideal. Did we but press forward to realise by faith, and fidelity to grace, the great ideal of a Christ-inspired life, then the world would be quick to acknowledge its power, and reverence its consistency with the ideal of the religion which we profess.

There must come, we trust there is beginning to come, a time when the majority of preachers shall give us something more than a standard of mere human morality. We are impatient of platitudes, we want the ideal of a living faith, a supernatural life, and a real manifestation of Christ in all His poverty and self-sacrifice as well as in His Love. We long, too, to see Orders of men and women, pledged to absolute poverty and self-sacrifice, itinerating through our land, preaching the possibility and the reality of a practical ideal. We shall never do this until we live as Jesus Christ lived in the days of His short ministry. A great preacher spoke of this the other day; he said, "Every time I get up and thunder to my people from the pulpit, I feel ashamed to go back and live at home a life exactly like theirs, instead of fulfilling the ideal which Jesus Christ has set before us." We must hope soon to see bands of consecrated men and women, disciplined by careful training, going forth from their homes, wandering from

village to village, from town to town, preaching and comforting and visiting in every house, where they will be welcomed in the Name of the Lord. But what a preparation this needs, what a reality there must be in our experience, what a denunciation within our souls of all selfishness and all sin !

We can but make a start, and that start will best be made by taking *this day* the sin we clearly recognise, and allowing no compromise and no self-pity in our effort towards its extermination from our hearts. When we are once in earnest to overcome our faults, we may be certain that God will be faithful in making them known to us, but we shall not see more than we are trying to overcome.

Sometimes we wish we could see more of what is wrong in us. That is mere waste of time ; if we are strenuously dealing with what we realise now we have enough in hand. No doubt our confessions would be more interesting if the matter contained in them were new, but that is not the end we have in view ; and we may rest assured that the humiliation of having to confess continually the same old fault, denotes that we have not cut to the root of that, so why should the Holy Spirit lead us to struggle with another ? Let us set ourselves to the task in hand, and be courageous in our self-inflicted blows.

We shall never be truly holy until we truly desire holiness : desire it more than our ease, more than our comfort, more than our self-complacency. We need a strong vision of what a Christian can become by the grace of God, and this we shall best obtain by diligently studying the standard portrayed in the Holy Scriptures. We only do ourselves harm

by measuring ourselves by other Christians, we run the risk of becoming unreal by reading popular lives of the Saints, and thinking that we are emulating them.

The purity of the Gospels and Epistles will inspire us with the highest standard, the light of the Holy Ghost will reveal where we fall short of such an ideal. Our will must be strengthened by a resolute response to the revealed Will of God, which is the means of our Sanctification.

CHAPTER VI

RESTORATION TO UNION WITH GOD

"Then shall they be known, who are My chosen; and they shall be tried as the gold in the fire."

2 Esdras xvi. 73.

The analysis of motive, of which we thought in preceding pages, should lead us to realise that there is often a lack of sincerity of purpose which causes us to continue in a general habit of failure. Let us look within and question ourselves as to whether we are really sincere in our determination to rid ourselves, at all cost, of those imperfections and inconsistencies which so greatly mar the beauty of our life.

There are many who do not realise what a blessing Confessions of devotion are to aid us in this way. They see the benefit of the Sacrament of Penance for really grave sin, and they know the use of it in such a case is all the Catholic Faith really requires of us, but it is not all that the Church in her tender love for her children extends to us. She offers to us the benefit of absolution when we grow to realise how many sins there are which stain the feet in the daily path, even when we have been healed from the destructive power of mortal sin! She also offers to us, besides the benefit of absolution, the increase of Sacramental grace to help us in our

building up of the weak places in our character and will. Those who use the Sacrament in sincere desire to bring all imperfections—all venial sin—beneath the operation of the cleansing Flood know what an immense gain such a privilege brings to the soul. It is then that we begin to realise how many of our external faults have their origin in a low interior ideal. If we were to perceive more fully the degree of beauty in the Christian life to which it is possible to attain, we should have within ourselves a great impulse towards its attainment. In other words, our weakness has in it the lack of sufficient incentive. We do not realise sufficiently that all the many weaknesses of our soul's experience are not merely causing us to be full of faults, but are actually hindering the growth of the life of God within us, the Christ life, the heritage of our baptismal union with God. Every increase in love must tend to the increase of the desire for union. As love lies in the will, we shall by acts of the will come to experience a greater love for our Beloved, and tend more earnestly to cast out all that must hinder His approach to our souls. These acts of the will are the way in which we rise up and forsake sin in order to go to Him. They are typified each time we leave our place to make our Communion at the Altar. He comes to us, yes, but we must also rise and go to Him, leaving our place in the natural order of things and as individual souls passing into the holiest of all, where Jesus awaits us. This we should be repeating continually in our daily experience. The Church provides this possibility of Sacramental Communion at the beginning of each day ; and from that holy

hour we pass into the experience of daily life in order to live out that act of our will which in the morning united us to Him. We must always be leaving the natural condition of things to lift all our being up into the supernatural, and sanctify every word and deed by union with Jesus: but we can take nothing which is earthly with us: absolution is provided at the last moment before Communion, we go with our hearts and hands emptied of all that is unworthy.

So we may realise a higher motive and desire for that interior purity which alone can fit us for union with the Divine. We begin to recognise the need for interior cleansing of motive and thought, which are sometimes more subtle and elusive than open manifestations of sin.

With the conscious belief in the Sacramental Presence of our Blessed Lord within our hearts there grows exceedingly the realisation of the unfitness of our interior being to entertain so great a Guest. Love therefore prompts a more earnest endeavour, a more strenuous examination, and a higher ideal in our work of co-operation with God. The more we dwell with Him and He with us, the more must His Presence hallow all our being, and quicken our impulse to give ourselves completely to Him in Love.

His desire is towards us: but not towards all that is unworthy, selfish, and impure. He loves the soul as He sees it in Himself, wholly pure and wholly sanctified. As long as there is any portion of our being not yet owned and possessed by Him, so long we are delaying the fullness of our life in Him.

Now it is this indwelling Presence of our Lord

which will alone enable us to detect the hidden springs of sin within our hearts. Herein we see again love becomes the means of our sanctification. As long as our interior being was unconscious of its union with the Beloved, we probably remained in ignorance of much that was unworthy and wrong. So much illumination comes through the contact with another mind: we noted this in considering our exterior sins; but when once the soul has become really conscious of the Presence of the Lord: when once the soul's life has become beautiful in experience because very real intercourse has been established as a result of Communion with the Beloved, then there begins to dawn the consciousness that there are times when that desire of union is broken by something that has come between and hindered it. Our peace is disturbed: our Lord seems absent; and as we place ourselves in the searchlight of the Holy Ghost we are able to detect where the trouble is; we see in His light some thought or motive which is not, and never can be, pleasing to our Lord.

It will bring us to a far clearer knowledge of the sinfulness of our soul; and it is at such a time as this that many are apt to cry out in very real pain: "I seem to be growing worse and worse, I never had such evil thoughts before." But in reality we had those thoughts, only we were not conscious of them because the Presence of our Lord within our hearts had not been realised so well, and our love for Him was not so great. So it is our deeper love which has created within us a new realisation of sin, and a greater longing after holiness for His sake, and for His glory, that His

Presence within us may *not* be wounded and checked. It is quite possible that more advance in spiritual apprehension has also brought upon us fresh trials of the enemy, and these trials may have revealed some weakness within us we had never realised before. It is often so, but the exterior foe has no power to create evil within us, he cannot put into our hearts the evil tendencies we deplore; the soil was there in which his seeds could germinate, that is all.

It often follows that after some special revelation of our blessed Lord and His most wondrous love some altogether fresh circumstance may come into our life, and just when we desire to give ourselves up to spiritual enjoyment we are plunged instead into grievous conflict. What a comfort it will be to us in our trial if we realise at such a time that this experience is permitted in order that we may benefit *more* by the spiritual blessing we have received: not in order, as we are so apt to think, that we may lose it altogether. Let us illustrate this more clearly.

It may be God has granted to us some clear vocation. We hear distinctly the inward call, and cannot doubt that it is very definitely His will for us. We are thankful and rejoice. Almost immediately an entirely new and very definite chain of circumstances arise to hinder us from fulfilling that which we believed we were called to do. Every possible obstacle seems to be put into our way. Then perhaps we are filled with distress, we despair within and are irritable without: we regard with distaste all that we have previously been doing, and are almost inclined to think God

does not care for us at all. The sense of His Presence is for the moment entirely lost. Now what does all this mean? It means that the trial has been permitted in order to reveal within us lack of trust in God in that we doubt He will enable us in time to overcome the obstacles: impatience at the thwarting of our desires; and lack of single-hearted love in doing faithfully as unto God that which we already have in hand. What an immense gain such a trial will mean to us if we use it in order that we may recognise in it our special weaknesses; and pray that, as the trial has revealed within us what we really are, we will ask only that His will shall be effectually realised within us, wherever and in whatever way He will.

At times our Lord Himself draws near to us in a very special revelation of His Personality. Our hearts are lifted up in worship and adoration such as we have never known before: then He withdraws Himself, and months pass by with no consciousness that He is ever near. How do we bear the trial? Do we complain, and reproach Him in our prayer, or do we even cease to pray? If so, it reveals within us how much we desire spiritual favours for our own consolation and self-love, and how little we are content to wait for Him in humble thankfulness for every crumb of love we receive from His Table of Mercy and Love.

We shall thus see how all such trials are intimately connected with our interior relationship to Him. It is because we doubt His love, or lose the sense of His Presence, that the pain is felt acutely; such trials as these could not bring us pain unless we had realised the relationship of love

between Him and our soul. One who is unawakened to the experience of what true Communion means, will never come to realise the presence of these foes within; and so we may rejoice, inasmuch as the growing consciousness of wrong thoughts and motives betokens a higher spiritual consciousness, not, as we are so apt to think, a growing diminution in grace.

There is a very excellent discipline for us in the fact that external friends can help us very little here; and so we are drawn directly to seek the aid of the Holy Trinity to work in us towards this sanctification of our souls. No one but God can detect our inward thought and motive: it is therefore He alone who can rightly understand. This fact will tend to increase the blessed relationship between our souls and God. "*Work out your own salvation,*" "*It is God which worketh in you.*" It is God alone to Whom we turn in our sorrow at having grieved Him, and Who receives us even while we are so conscious of inward defilement, and Who will assure us, as we use the privilege of Sacramental healing, of His forgiveness and His power of restoration.

So the increased consciousness within us of our spiritual defects will work for good, if we use them to bring us nearer to our Lord. We must always, when burdened with a sense of wrong within, turn at once to Him in love. For it is then we need Him most of all. "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*"[1] In this way every fresh revelation of wrong within will tend to a nearer intimacy with our Lord, until He in time

[1] St. Matt. ix. 12.

will cleanse His Temple throughout and we shall dwell with Him in love.

How earnestly, then, must we welcome all the trials and disciplines He may bring upon our souls, if they only serve to effect so glorious an end. They must come to the one who is growing in grace, for by them, and them alone, are revealed the weak places in our spiritual life. Nay, even the very virtues which His grace within our souls imparts, are proved and realised by the discipline and trials. How can we realise we love God if our love is never tested by the mysteries of His dealings which we cannot understand; or the apparent sense of loss and desolation which arid days produce?

We all begin by believing so much in ourselves that it takes us long before we realise we are nothing that is good apart from grace. But the gradual growth in the knowledge of that truth will ever tend to make us depend more and more upon God, and we shall seek the blessedness of knowing that He will not leave us until He has re-created within us the fair Image of His Son.

CHAPTER VII

RESTORATION TO VISION

"Go thy way, and tell My people what manner of things, and how great wonders of the Lord thy God, thou hast seen."
2 Esdras ii. 48.

As the soul advances in the way of sanctification, its conception of sin undergoes a very great change. The horror of sin is unrealised by us in our early days, we are too poisoned by its presence within ourselves. But as the Blessed Presence of our Lord gradually deepens within our soul—as all that is unworthy is cast out—so do we learn to look with purer vision upon that which is so alienated from the Divine likeness.

So there increases within the consciousness a perception of sin which makes it perfectly abhorrent to the soul. A clearer understanding grows of the experience of the Saints in ways which we have thought morbid and exaggerated in the past. An intense pain is felt at the realisation of sin within ourselves, and if we attain to any real degree of union with God, we shall suffer more over some small defect than we did in the past over a grievous sin. This will be because we shall have realised such an intense love for God that anything that wounds that love is intolerable. Anything which for an instant causes separation from the

Beloved is beyond endurance. This is a degree of love which may seem a very long way from our actual experience, but it is well that we should understand it as a possibility in the soul's achievement: and at least appreciate its reality as we study the experiences of the great mystics.

How incomprehensible the writings of St. John of the Cross must appear to an unspiritual and untaught soul! They are incomprehensible to the natural man; but once a soul has entered upon the mystic way, and realised something of the relationship of love which is the very essence of the mystical life, it must dawn upon the consciousness that the apparently incomprehensible experience such saints have recorded for our guidance, is probably the result of a heavenly vision altogether beyond our present apprehension; and, especially in the case St. John of the Cross, deeply inspired by the Holy Scriptures.

Let us, therefore, study such experiences with exceeding reverence. There are many who believe the perusal of such works is deleterious to the soul only yet advancing in the earlier degrees of spiritual experience. It may be dangerous where the soul is untrained in practical reality; but all knowledge is dangerous to such an one. If we are grounded in stability, and the foundation of penitence upon which we alone can build our spiritual castle, it will matter little what we read of more advanced truths, we cannot benefit in any case from them.

On the other hand, to know what exists as a possibility of experience for the soul, if it is studied with humility and sincerity, must undoubtedly inspire within us a higher spiritual ideal. Who

can read St. Teresa's "Mansions" without understanding that the higher degrees of prayer are only vouchsafed to those who have been extraordinarily faithful in all the earlier degrees? How clearly she discourages any presumption in thinking ourselves able to grasp God's greatest gifts by our own attainment! How unswervingly she points out that humility is the hallmark of all sincere advance, and how certain it is that without practical virtue there will be no true vision of the higher ways of prayer!

Those who are unreal and self-deceived will always imagine themselves in some false experience whether they study the mystic writers or not: for this reason only, therefore, it would be surely a mistake to discourage other sincere souls from studying what has been revealed through saintly souls. But they should certainly be studied at the fountain-head, their own writings, not through the distorted channel of some one else's interpretation of them. If popular lives of the saints were excluded from our library it would be no great loss: it might even be an inestimable gain, whereas we may learn much from the pure writings of the Saints themselves.

Above all, were we only more awakened to the riches of the Holy Scriptures, we should find therein more food for our souls than in any other writings. Few who read the sacred pages seem to be conscious that all these deeper experiences of the soul's life are portrayed for us in the words of God's greatest Saints. Where shall we better study the acute awakening to sin, and the highest degree of penitence, than in the words of David? What a

marvellous study in penitence has been portrayed by the Psalmist in Psalm li. alone!

We may realise how this was recognised by St. John of the Cross when we see in Baker's Edition of his works the index of references to scriptural quotations in his writings. They are so numerous that we are forced to realise his writings were saturated with quotations from the Holy Scriptures, and in this fact we doubtless have the key to the sense of *truth* which so impresses his readers, and the intense beauty of his thoughts.

When we, however, have the direction of certain souls, whom we perceive have never been carefully taught the earlier stages of the spiritual life, we may do well to direct their whole attention to their present needs. In such cases higher study and knowledge may be postponed; but not with any suggestion that they would be harmed by such a knowledge, but only that later on they would be more capable of receiving benefit.

What, then, is this clearer conception which tends to such a real abhorrence of sin? Sin is the negation of all that is good: all, therefore, which God is *not*. What a clear definition this is, what simplicity comes from its realisation; but it represents such an upheaval of our natural selves that it requires a considerable spiritual experience to gain it. We are in ourselves saturated with thoughts, motives, impulses which are not of God; and it is impossible to clear ourselves really from the influences consequent upon sin, until we enter into such reality of relationship with God that we are able to discern the true value of things from His point of view. Like the blind man when his sight

was partially recovered, we most of us only see "*men as trees walking*," that is, a perverted view, not possessing the dignity and beauty of God's unsullied creation. The pure in heart shall see God, yes, and they shall also see all other things in God, in the clear light of His Sanctity; and in the exquisite purity with which they proceed from Him, or the darkness which denotes their separation from Him. With God, and with the souls who dwell in God, there is no twilight; what is not of the day is of the night.

To a soul who has attained to any realisation of this, whose experience in love is very real and sincere, an intense horror must result from the contemplation of sin. But their very nearness to God gives them a supernatural strength which enables them to bear this revelation.

The reason of our slowness to detect evil in ourselves is our lack of courage: we cannot bear the knowledge of what we really are; so it must always seem as though the revelation of God's holiness and our own sinfulness can only be intensely realised after we can say with St. Paul, "*I know that in me (that is, my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.*" This is a stumbling-block to many because they believe that there is a certain amount of good within themselves, and they feel that to deny it would be to be unreal. This is, however, an error; any good in us of absolute value is solely and only the effect of the grace of God within us; and if that grace were withdrawn we should find the virtue fail also. As long as we are clinging to a belief in certain points of virtue in ourselves, we shall feel bitterly the humiliation

of finding under trial we have them not. How very often souls are intensely discouraged through disillusionment with themselves! Some new circumstance or trial has caused the illusion to pass away. They have failed where they believed they were most strong, and the blow is bitter—because they believed in themselves.

Now God never produces His virtues in us apart from His indwelling Grace. It is impossible to conceive that He could do so. Goodness in God is inseparable from God, therefore goodness is only God within us. It is nothing that *we* are. Therefore in the degree to which we are not yet one with Him, so shall we be liable to fall; but we need not be surprised or dismayed, it is only what we should expect.

There is a natural goodness which is relative and also illustrative of the Christian idea—relative in the sense that it is formed by its environment. Natural goodness is regulated by the standard of morality in its immediate surroundings. Where that moral character is found in Christian surroundings it partakes of a Christian character, and is often mistaken for the virtues which are divinely inborn in the Christian. It is here that people are often confused as to the relative beauty of a Christian and an unbeliever. But were a sufficiently strong test brought to bear upon the merely natural virtue, we should speedily find how frail it is compared to the supernatural power of withstanding trials which a saint of God possesses.

All Christians, alas! have not risen to an experimental knowledge of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, though they are

baptised, they do not rise to any degree of supernatural grace: these may fare badly under excessive trials, but we must not judge their failure to be any weakness in the religion they possess, but to lie in the poverty of their perception of its potentialities.

When, therefore, we perceive that apart from grace we are not good, because *not of God*, we are not surprised to find the seed of any special sin within us. We *expect* it to be there, not morbidly, but as an unnatural condition when in consequence of the fall we lost our union with God. Of course that union was restored at Baptism, and had we been perfectly instructed as to what our spiritual inheritance was, and had we perfectly responded to the gifts of that inheritance, we might have escaped the falls we have too often experienced; but even so, we should still have been born with a nature which needed thus to be united to God, as it was in its creation destined to be.

As our spiritual perception increases, the clearer vision will enable us with courage to perceive the true condition of the soul apart from God. We are able to look to the "hole" of the past "whence ye are digged," and it will create within the soul realisation of the horror of separation from God. This is indeed well; and as the soul comes to realise it, it needs no human words or similes to portray the awfulness of that state. To some it has been granted in God's providence to realise the condition of the lost in their own spiritual experience. They have been taken, like Ezekiel, and caused to see Visions of the spiritual world, and even to experience sufferings immeasurably beyond human

pain. At such times, we are told, they are upheld by the conviction that during the suffering they are permitted to feel, they are held closely within the Hand of God : and they are conscious that in will they are still united with Him, and that therefore they are not actually in the state they are permitted to contemplate. We can well understand how such as these are filled with a conviction of truth, and a horror of sin which will inspire them to go forth as a true prophet of the Lord. The Vision is not granted them for their own edification, but as an equipment for some vast and far-reaching work. Such, doubtless, were the prophets of the Old Testament. Such, we may perceive, was the experience of St. Paul ; but we have yet adequately to realise God needs such souls in all generations, and it is through those only who have courage to bear the Vision that He can once more thunder forth His message of Judgment and sweetly whisper His words of love.

THE END

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PART II.

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INTRODUCTION

It is our intention in this second part of the book to discuss questions which arise concerning the practice of the Sacrament of Absolution. In many instances the answers to these questions can only be a matter of judgment, and therefore not to be accepted with any weight of authority. We have tried to distinguish clearly between private opinion and authority.

There are many souls who are too reserved to ask questions, and who therefore continue in their use of the Sacraments with a doubtful mind, uncertain whether they are making the best use of their opportunities; there are others who have qualms about accepting advice which has been given them; to such as these the following pages we hope may bring some light. Further we would hope that others may be led into a deeper realization of the benefit there is to be received through an intelligent and regular use of this most wonderful Sacrament.

The opponents to the Sacrament of Absolution are assuredly those who know little or nothing about it. There are some who, through prejudice, oppose that of which they know nothing: there

are others who, having once made their confession, never do so again, either because they went from mistaken motives or because, and this is by no means unfrequently the cause, they have fallen into a sin which they are too ashamed to confess. Strange that the shame of confession should be stronger than the shame of sin! In either case it may be remarked that the experimental knowledge of the Sacrament is very slight, and also that we are apt to speak strongly upon a subject which is the cause of a troubled conscience.

Surely the value of any practice must be judged by those who recognize the power which authorizes it, and also who faithfully make use of the same; in this case, not only an increasingly large number of people, but for the most part a soundly healthy one. Unfortunately it is so often the less healthy-minded who talk about these private matters of the spiritual life, and thereby give the impression that Confession is the privilege of more or less neurotic souls, and one obviously to be deplored. The normal balanced Catholic shrinks from light speech on matters of gravity.

It is, however, impossible to convince those who do not wish to be convinced, and therefore we take comfort in the remembrance that the Faith in all its grandeur in no way depends upon our imperfect apprehension; and as the Sacrament has through the centuries of the Church's history brought restoration to millions of sin-stained souls, so it will continue to do so, apart from our individual acceptance or rejection of its truth.

We must admit that the English Branch of the Church as she emerges from her Protestant poverty

lacks experience in many ways of Catholic practice, and that mistakes are made both in the use and the administration of this very Sacrament ; but, after all, are they so great as they might have been ? Have we not in this, as in other ways, cause for great thanksgiving that the Presence of the Holy Ghost within our Church has saved us from making very grievous mistakes in the days of our ignorance ? There is also a healthiness of tone among English men and women which is a heritage by no means to be despised, and it is just in this way that the Sacrament of Absolution appeals to us in a very special sense, because our *healthiness of mind demands confession*, as something altogether good, even could it be separated from the greater gift of Absolution. Far from making us morbid, it has exactly the contrary effect, it enables us to throw off the burden of sin, and obtain the freedom that an Englishman essentially desires.

This is not written with any desire to minimize the fact that we receive and use the Sacraments solely and only upon the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Catholic Church ; but in order to express our conviction that English Catholicism has its own peculiar contribution to make, not only in strength of intellectual life, but in its witness to the fact that Catholicism aids and encourages, not depreciates, that public school spirit which is so essentially part of our honourable inheritance as members of the English race.

I.

OUR MEASURE OF OBLIGATION

How far are we, as English Church people, bound to use this Sacrament? We essentially dislike the thought of obligation when it is used in relation to our interior will. This is not altogether obstinacy as we may be inclined to think: it is possibly a recognition of the ultimate freedom of the soul which is our birthright as members of the human race. Ultimately the individual must be responsible in a great measure to God alone, and the teaching that we must perforce be wrong if we are not absolutely obedient to a system which is expressed by human authority may at critical moments break down. This cannot, however, be taken as an excuse for not accepting authority when we have evidence, as in the case of the authority of the Catholic Church, that it is Divine in its origin. It is, nevertheless, within the path of wisdom that the English Church still allows a certain freedom with regard to this great question of discipline for sin, and does not over-ride the individual conscience entirely concerning its own need.

Nevertheless that cannot excuse us in the least from a careful examination of the claim the Sacrament of Absolution has upon the soul. We

cannot close our eyes to the fact that its place has never been lost in the English Church, although it has been at times obscured. Moreover, no Catholic worthy of the name has in the past failed to benefit by its ministration : it is only to those who are emerging from the hold of Protestantism that it presents such alarming difficulties. Therefore we may well question whether the liberty granted to our conscience by the English Church can be lawfully interpreted as a consent to us not to use this Sacrament at all. Such an idea could never have presented itself to the minds of those who were freeing the Church from superstitious errors, because they could never have had any conception of the Church without a full recognition of the place and importance this Sacrament had always held in her general ministrations.

To call the Sacrament compulsory, however, was another matter, since it must imply that sin is compulsory. Therefore it is difficult to defend the Fourth Lateran Council when in 1315 it demanded that all Christians should, on pain of excommunication, make their confessions once yearly. The English Church has done well to adhere, or rather return to the primitive Rule which provides this great means of Grace, and invites those who are conscious of sin to use it; rather than to adopt the untheological basis of first teaching that Sacramental Confession is only necessary for mortal sin ;—and then enforcing Confession to be made by all who desire to remain faithful to their Church.

To turn, however, to our more logical position, we see that as the Catholic Church as a whole has

indisputably accepted this Sacrament as one of the great means of Grace, we must be incurring loss if we fail to profit by its administration. Moreover, we should be exercising individual judgment against the united judgment of the whole and undivided Church. It would also involve us in the position of being the sole judges of our conscience ! When we say that we are sure that God will forgive us if we secretly confess our sins to Him we are nearly in the same position as the one who says : " It will all come right in the end ; " for the more we are sinning against our knowledge of right and wrong the more obscure shall we become in our judgment, and the less able to judge whether we are in any degree penitent or not. Therefore the position must be at least a very dangerous one. We are not bound by Catholic rule to confess venial sin (though we shall see in another chapter that it is our privilege to be allowed to do so), but we may question whether we are not morally bound to submit our opinion as to which sins are mortal, and which are venial, to a more competent and unbiased judgment than our own.

In discussing whether we are or are not bound to avail ourselves of this Sacrament we have not considered one point, namely, the Grace which accompanies all the Sacraments of the Church. We do not in this case only receive forgiveness for our sins, but we receive also that especial gift of Grace which is conferred with Absolution, and which is called Sacramental Grace. Therefore one who seeks to evade the Church's ministry of Reconciliation certainly loses, not only the

spoken assurance of forgiveness, but the accompanying strength of Sacramental Grace within the soul. How many can witness to the great increase in strength and power to resist temptation which has come through the regular use of this Sacrament, and growth has become so much more rapid as we have become more definite in our ideal.

Further, it may be questioned, why then do souls use this Sacrament who are certainly not under mortal sin, or apparently in danger of it ?*

The Church has always encouraged Confessions of Devotion. When we realize that our Lord conferred on the Church the power to absolve from sin, and to restore the soul to its original innocence, the desire naturally arises to receive this Sacramental Grace when as far as we can judge venial sins have alone stained the purity of the soul, although all Grace has by no means been lost, as is the case with mortal sin. The more sensitive the soul becomes to sin, the more shall we know our need of the cleansing power of the Blood of Jesus ; and our Lord, Who bade the human brother forgive to seventy times seven, has never limited our approach to the Fountain of His healing Power. If, therefore, there is no sin which is too great, so also can there be no sin which is too small to bring to the foot of Calvary.

It is noteworthy, is it not, that those who are most conscious of their imperfections are those

* (A sin, to be mortal, must be a grave matter, fully recognized to be grave, and which is deliberately consented to. Thus, where there is ignorance of the gravity of evil, or the action was wholly unpremeditated and accidental, the sin would probably be venial. This requires careful analysis by a judge who is expert in moral theology; hence our lack of wisdom in constituting ourselves our own judge.)

who are living the highest life of Grace? The tendency as the soul advances in knowledge is to use the Sacrament more frequently, not less; so that fact alone proves how conscious all become of the real benefit received by those who come regularly and with careful preparation to Confession; and how it tends to decrease the possibility of sinning greatly against the Love and Mercy of God.

So we see in all this, that it is not a question of how far we are bound, but of how far it is our privilege to count our Confessions among the regular habits of our life. Not of necessity, but of privilege; and we who know this privilege are not among those who argue about it, but quietly in the secret places of our soul thank God for the inestimable blessing that it has proved to us.

The question is frequently asked: Should one go to Confession with little or no feeling of sorrow for sin?

The *fact* of sin should bring us to Confession, it makes no difference to our responsibility whether we feel sorrow for sin or not. The feeling of sorrow for sin, compunction, is a grace which more often follows confession than precedes it. At least in the case of those who have not made considerable progress in the spiritual life. If there has been sin, especially if the sin includes grave neglect of the means of grace, deadness of soul is the most evident result, as it is the result of all disease, physical or moral. Therefore we must act on knowledge, not on feelings, and we must regard our spiritual stupor as the very sign which denotes our dangerous state. If we can sin against God,

and experience no grief, indeed it is obvious we need sacramental grace and restoration. The great penitent in our Lord's Parable said, "I will arise and go," he said nothing about being sorry.

How difficult it is to realize that there is no mention made in the Bible of feelings in connection with the spiritual life. Yet we seem not to be able to speak for one moment concerning our interior life without using the words: "I feel." The part emotion plays in our life is a very real one, inasmuch as it stirs the will to action; but in many instances the will must act according to its knowledge of right and wrong, without any stirrings of the emotions whatever.

Genuine sorrow for sin is a very real grace, and it has its degrees as the soul advances in Grace, passing from repentance to contrition (*i.e.*, bruising) and to compunction (piercing) when we really begin to sorrow because of the wound sin has inflicted upon love, especially the Love of the Sacred Heart.

To those who are instructed in the Catholic Faith and have accepted its authority in their baptismal vows, it remains, therefore, very simply to see that it is the fact of sin which should bring us to confession, and not our feelings towards it. Our knowledge of what is right and wrong must be our basis of action: our moral sense cannot be formed on our private judgment, but upon the accepted standards of faith and practice in the Catholic Church.

Most earnestly, therefore, would we advise those, who are only conscious of deadness within,—the lethargy of indifference,—and who find in the thought

of confession something altogether difficult and repugnant, that they should "arise and go," realizing that assuredly they are the ones most in need of the Church's healing touch. It may be that for a time God will withhold great sorrow for sin, or joy in forgiveness; these are Graces which are under His control to give or to withhold according to His wisdom. It may well be that the absence of any sensible consolation is needed in order to strengthen our obedience to, as well as our faith in, the sacramental life. If we give up the practice because of this, it shows that either our faith or our obedience is lacking, and therefore our religion is not based on a firm foundation. The condition which finds confession a blessing merely because of the consolation which follows is a very dangerous one: God will not encourage us to seek for such false emotions. If we do not experience joy through religious practices, therefore, do not let us be anxious or wonder, let us leave all consolation entirely to the wisdom of God, Who alone knows the condition of our soul; and Who is more eager than we can ever possibly imagine to pour His love forth in all joy upon the soul who is strong enough in faith and discipline to bear it.

II

DIFFICULTIES IN PREPARATION

THERE are periods in every Catholic's experience when it is found to be difficult to make our preparation. This is a very real trouble to the soul; and one that is dangerous because it may result in a less frequent use of the Sacrament, or in making confessions that are unreal.

In the first place to lessen the regularity of our confessions may not be a wise course, because it is no remedy for the case. So often the thought is expressed: "I am quite sure there must be much that is wrong, but I cannot see it." This is probably true, and it is not that we do not need the Absolution which we greatly long to receive. Therefore we must seek the remedy elsewhere than in less frequent confessions. Although, alas, this is advice given not infrequently by priests who do not realize that it is help in preparation that is needed when the Confession seems slight and imperfect.

On the other hand, we must avoid the tendency to magnify matters of trivial importance, or to confess as sin that which is not of the nature of sin at all. In the Religious Life the criticism given by superiors makes the matter of preparation a much easier thing, and assuredly such just and blessed correction should not cease with the Novitiate, for what we all lack as we grow older is just

that wholesome criticism which should, if rightly received, be an aid to progress. Blessed are those who can say with Kingsley: "I had a friend;" but more blessed are they who can speak of that friendship in the present tense, if we aspire to make our friendships such aids to virtue, not to flattery, as is set forth for us in the pages of S. Teresa's *Way of Perfection*. When, however, our path is a lonely one, and there is no one with whom we may commune on the ways of the spiritual life, when temptations are those of thought rather than deed, we grow into the danger of becoming self-engrossed, and morbid through self-centredness.

What is the remedy? We believe it to lie in perceiving the prevailing misconception that self-examination means grubbing for sins, as we might search an ashpit to find something worth taking hold of! And the one is about as profitable as the other! We cannot help realizing that the average standard among professing Christians is not a very high one, although our modern conception of the relation between faith and morals shows the immeasurable advance upon past centuries. Nevertheless, although the general tone is higher, the absence in our branch of the Church of teaching upon the higher ways of the spiritual life, in prayer and spiritual attainment, is very marked: the consequence is that our Church life is not the School for Saints which it ought to be. We are setting far more value upon controversial work than upon spiritual growth, forgetting in our short-sightedness that one saintly life will convert more people to the Faith than hundreds of zealous Catholics who have more zeal than knowledge.

This attitude is affecting our examination of conscience. Our ideals are not sufficiently high. We think we are all right if we are observing the Rules of the Church, and do not commit mortal sin, or flagrant venial sin. In this condition of mind we deal very little with the many imperfections of our character, and the enervation of our will, and fail therefore to rise to anything like the nobility of character and spiritual strength that God has destined for us.

Even when we enter into Retreat, in the addresses given we may miss the call to a higher vision of conduct, it is all too abstract, too lacking in a real knowledge of an ideal life which makes us long to aspire after the highest.

We must remember, however, that it may not only be a lack of vision. There is the very real obstacle of pride. Our false understanding of ourselves may also be due to the vanity which refuses to recognize that the suggestions offered by the world are just. Very often it is that we have first of all refused light in our own conscience; for we are inclined to believe God does not employ outside criticism at least to a prayerful soul unless we are deaf to the greater gentleness of the interior Voice. It would be valuable to note how often we have been honestly conscious of a fault *interiorly* before it has been brought to our notice by an exterior voice? We may soon detect vanity in ourselves if we are annoyed to hear our weaknesses alluded to by outside criticism.

To return, however, to the lack of vision. Let us review our methods of self-examination. Far too habitual is the use of lists of questions such as

are found in devotional manuals. It is curious that although Confessors habitually deplore the use of these formal lists, the effects of which so entirely spoil the spontaniety of the confession, they still continue to be used. Probably this is from the lack of a better method. We need some standard, and these printed forms do at least suggest to us what may be wrong. The inference, however, may unfortunately be drawn that if we are not guilty of any of these obvious forms of wrong we have really nothing to confess. Such an attitude of mind belongs also to those who say glibly : " I have never done anything very wrong." It covers the attitude of self-complacency we cannot help connecting with many conventional souls.

The first essential of a good examination of conscience is that we should enter upon it with a direct approach to God. We may have been in the habit of using a prayer for light, but we know that people often in human affairs ask for our opinion, yet never wait for an answer. To merely pray for light is not sufficient unless we approach God, and remain in His Presence consciously while we examine ourselves. We must be mindful too of the fact of the indwelling Spirit of Light. We might as well seek to turn out a room without drawing the curtains, as to attempt to see the defects of our souls without the direct action of the Holy Ghost. The cases are very parallel, because in turning out a room in the dark we should probably only remove the things we tumble against, and they might not be the things other people tumble against at all ! So with our faults.

To examine ourselves in the conscious Presence

of the Holy Ghost is not so simple as it sounds, because it is often accompanied by a consciousness of fear. It is an awful thing to ask God to give us light upon ourselves, and we shrink more than we realize from self-knowledge. Nevertheless, to an honest soul this real waiting upon God in silence will result in a reminder of some incident or some unfaithfulness which is the one thing God desires to set right in our character. Therefore, it is much to be recommended that this exercise should have a time set apart for it, if possible, every day. If we have not tried this we have no conception what an effect the consequent light would have upon our growth in self-knowledge.

Secondary in importance is the practical application of our daily Bible reading. It is not enough to read through a passage, we want to read our Bibles not only in order to learn more about God, but also to see in the Holy Scriptures our own Rule of Life. We want to measure ourselves by that Rule. Our self-complacency comes from measuring ourselves by the human standards of our environment. The Scriptures judge us by the standard of God and of His Saints.

We must not think it is humble to have low aspirations. To say that we shall never be Saints, as some of us are so fond of doing, is to think that we may lightly set aside God's purpose for us, it is merely an excuse for spiritual idleness. We shall have to justify our lack of attainment as well as our sins when we are at last bound to face the reality of personal responsibility.

It is undoubtedly safer to take the Holy Scriptures as our basis of examination instead of the

lives of men and women who are made known to us through the medium of human biography, and of whose real difficulties we know so little. On the one hand they make us despair; on the other, they may incite us to imitate their achievements without having lived their lives. We must realize all greatness is led up to during the entire previous life. Moreover, when we are aiming at what a Saint did, we must also remember what a Saint suffered; and compare that with our oft-times failure under trial. Nevertheless, a great biography has its message, and if we study these by the test of the Holy Scriptures, and the traditions of the Church, we must very considerably benefit by the example of their lives. Let us, however, keep to genuine biography, and not to imaginative writings full of a false sentimentality.

In these ways we shall pass on from the Confession of what we have done, or left undone, to an increasing perception of what we are. We shall keep a stricter watchfulness over our thoughts, discerning in them the motive for much that is unworthy, as well as realizing how our interior thoughts often desecrate the shrine wherein He would dwell. It will not be only the spoken word that will trouble us, but the thought against chastity, the motive of self-glory, the secret indulgence of self-love. Happy is the soul who is swift in self-condemnation, and is able to instantly and firmly handle these hidden roots of bitterness; checked in their early growth, they will never be allowed to bring forth fruit so unworthy of the Servant of Christ.

There are further suggestions for preparation

which we have found to be of value. We may take a definite passage of Scripture bearing upon the season perhaps, or upon the especial trial we may be passing through. In the first case to meditate upon our fellowship with Christ, as His Body still upon earth,—our participation in the experiences of His Incarnate Life ; or in the second case to ascertain *what is expected of us* undergoing our present experience.

Another method is to imagine ourselves standing at the foot of the Crucifix, and to examine ourselves by the sight of that Sacred Form, the visible manifestation of the results of sin.

We have not yet touched upon the very real danger of confusing intellectual appreciation with experience. There is always the possibility of believing that what we have seen to be the right standard of attainment, we can instantly become. We must not lose sight of the necessity for the daily battle of our will, warring against the love of self, and slothfulness. Meditation inspires the will to act : we see :— we desire :— yes, but we can only attain to that standard of conduct by a laborious work within us against our lower tendency. Life must be a continual mortification, not of beautiful humanity, which has been taken up into the Christ, God forbid ; but of mortification against those powers within us which war against our fellowship with the actual present life of Christ within the soul.

III

CONCERNING COUNSEL

WHEN we are making our confession to another than our Director, we may wonder whether we should seek for Counsel. In general cases it is not necessary, and the words may be omitted, and penance and absolution alone asked for. There are always exceptions, and in asking permission to make our confession to some one else, we may inquire also upon this point. It would certainly be usual to seek counsel from a Retreat Conductor : he by virtue of leading the Retreat is the temporary guide of our souls. It is, moreover, a very useful thing in making a review of the past year, as we should do in Retreat, to have the judgment of a wise priest other than the one who habitually advises us. He would, of course, be careful not to interfere in the general training of the soul. No wise priest, other than the habitual Director would ever strongly advise a soul on any point, unless they have been sent to him for special Counsel.

We can conceive of occasions, however, when the rule might have an exception, and this needs to be considered. There may be times when a penitent may be greatly perplexed, and the counsel given by a confessor seems impossible to accept. If such a case should arise, there would appear to

be no harm in seeking advice from a priest of known repute as a confessor: the difficulty might be stated without mentioning the identity of any other priest. Another case might arise when we were away from our home, and urgently in need of counsel: then it might rightly be asked, for we must always remember there is a great difference between counsel and direction; and counsel may be given on a special point without any interference in direction.

Of course on any grave matter the advice given should be mentioned to our Director afterwards.

All this pre-supposes that we have a Director, and do not merely make our Confessions. Is this necessary? It is necessary as far as any direction is necessary. It is possible for our life to be directed according to our own judgment, just as it is possible to direct ourselves in secular subjects: but is it wise? If there are masters of the spiritual life just as there are masters of science or of languages, should we not make surer progress if we sought their aid? Are we the best authority upon the guidance of our life? Cannot another, by virtue of his ordination, and the accompanying gift of the Holy Ghost, greatly aid us in the conduct of our spiritual progress? "They watch for our souls as those who must give account." To merely hear the confession of our faults cannot be all that is implied in the meaning of those words. The Holy Scriptures recognize the true Fatherhood of the Priest. How full the writings of St. Paul are of the recognition of this relationship to the souls committed to his care.

How far would this curtail that liberty of

conscience so dear to our English minds? Truly, obedience holds very high rank in the Catholic Faith. Certainly blessing is bestowed upon the soul who is obedient when it involves a yielding of personal opinion: this is of course safeguarded by the fact that we must never obey counsel which is contrary to Catholic tradition; but obedience in personal choice has always been reverenced by the Church.

There are not lacking evidences of disaster when those who practise the Catholic Faith yet persistently maintain their own independence. It is less uncommon than may be supposed. A person may make up his or her mind on a definite course of action which does not meet with their Director's approval. Yet the course is persisted in against counsel; and if the discouragement is strong, often the penitent (*sic!*) will change their confessor rather than not get their own way. These are cases which lead to grave issues. They lead to almost incurable spiritual unreality, and also in some cases to religious mania. In one case of suicide from spiritual delusion a former Director stated: "I tried to curb her early extravagances, but she would not listen, and because I disapproved she went elsewhere."

The safest path will never be a self-chosen one, but the one taken with guidance of a higher authority. It is a discipline which may feel irksome at the time, but it causes our path to be far more direct. Never for one moment need it impede true individuality, or prevent us from experiencing our own spiritual romance, in those realms of the soul known only to ourselves and God.

IV

STUDIES IN SELF-EXAMINATION

In conclusion, let us enter a little into detail concerning the method of examining our conscience by the creation of a higher ideal : revealed in the Holy Scriptures, or in Meditation upon Divine truths.

Certainly this presupposes the practice of Meditation, yes, we cannot seriously contemplate a healthy spiritual life without it. It may be of the most elemental form, but as we have often advised those who through the circumstances of life cannot devote a definite time daily to quiet, it is perfectly possible to attain to a real practice of Meditation by taking one verse daily and pondering over it as we pursue our daily round. This is possible for all, and it is also essential. Let us consider, therefore, the effect of taking one verse with us into a day's life. Let us select, chosen over-night :

"*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*"

That which was our prevailing thought yesterday will be our first thought to-day. We may at once become conscious, therefore, that there is a conflict, between some grievance, or sense of injury, or rebellion about our circumstances, and the Mind of Jesus ! We may argue that it is perfectly

just and lawful for us to think as we are thinking, we have a right to our resentment, but as we compare our condition of mind with the mind that was in Jesus we shall realize that the two are incompatible. We cannot pray, and harbour grievances, we cannot accept that which the providence of God has allowed, and at the same time be resentful. Now the mind of Jesus was at the same time prayerful, and also in absolute harmony with the permission of God concerning the injuries inflicted upon Him. Therefore, He could bear no resentment. God had allowed it; and rightly accepted, the issue, even of the wrong done, would be for Him and those whom He had come to save, ultimate good. This killed all possibility of resentment. In arguing thus we also shall bring all that is wrong concerning the relation of others towards us up on to the plane of that which God has permitted ; and therefore can be turned to good.

We go forward into the day before us. Some incident necessitates us making some choice. Our inclination points one way, but we bring to bear upon our decision the mind of Christ. Again we cannot argue that we can follow a lower course, which may be one of self-indulgence, compromise, or even doubtful good. Our standard suggests a higher one. Our conduct will either follow this, or rebel against it.

We enter into conversation with someone whom we come across. Almost certainly some subject will arise which requires a clear judgment. Will it be a worldly one, or a Christian one ? They are almost always diametrically opposed. Again

our short sentence of Divine truth interposes in our thoughts. It decides for us.

Alone, in the train, in the house, in the street, our thoughts are like butterflies flitting here and there. Hours are wasted daily by the lack of thought control. Here then, and now, let us feed upon the food our Divine Master used, and let us grow into the habit of pondering over things that really matter. Only a habit after all.

Thus in one day we may have gathered, all unconsciously, matter for our next confession, which will at the same time mark a real advance in grace, and at the same time we have denied our oft-repeated statement : " I cannot meditate."

" I have harboured thoughts of resentment against another.

" I have complained against the providence of God.

" I have not used the difficulties of my life as means of growing in grace, but have only pitied myself for having to bear them.

" I have given way to self-indulgence, when I had an opportunity for an unselfish action.

" I have adopted a worldly policy in conversation with others, and spoken like a child of the world, and not as a child of God.

" I have wasted time in all kinds of frivolous thoughts when I might have used my mind to grow in spiritual and intellectual knowledge.

" I have injured the spirit of prayerfulness by this misuse of my time for thought."

At the various seasons of the Church, our meditations would naturally be concerned with the special event commemorated. At Easter-tide

we might take the great fact of our present participation with the Resurrection of our Lord, as explained in Romans VI., and following on from this basis, judge ourselves by its application in Colossians III.

We note some of the points which would serve for self-examination.

"*Seek those things which are above: . . . set your affection* (or mind) *on things above, not on things of earth.*" How covetous and envious we still are of this world's gifts: which of us is not condemned by this injunction? Let us specify to ourselves just what we are seeking in material ways over and above the necessities of life; and what we are seeking in the ways of self-pleasing, and love of human opinion.

Mortify therefore:—bring to death all that tends to sin, all the indulgence of that which is purely selfish and serves no profitable end. We must judge ourselves by a spiritual law because we are spiritual beings, therefore the animal life must be in subjection, and only used as a definite aid to the aims of our higher ideal, not as acts of self-indulgence. This requires a strict examination and watchfulness.

Further, we are reminded not only of sins of self-indulgence, but of those sins of the mind, which so often escape notice:

Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, unclean speech, lying.

The new man, St. Paul tells us, is renewed in knowledge after the Image of Him Who created Him. In other words, we know better, because the Mind of Christ dwelleth in us.

It will be well for us to note that the sins called by strong names are all seedlings before they attain to their full growth of ugliness. It is the seedlings which we should pull up when we prepare for the Sacrament of Absolution. We often wait for their full growth before we realize that they are there. Even, alas, we at times allowing them to bear seed !

Finally, St. Paul reminds us not only of our sins, but of those fruits of holy living which should be apparent in the life of one who has risen with Christ. Why ? Because we are holy and beloved, therefore we must be merciful, kind, humble, meek, long-suffering, forbearing, forgiving, loving, peaceful.

Let us pause over each one of these attributes of a true Christian's life.

Further we are enjoined to do as our Lord told us to do when He said "*If my words abide in you,*" we are to become increasingly heavenly-minded by storing in our memories the truths of heavenly Wisdom.

Finally, we are given explicit instructions upon the relationships of life.

Do we find it difficult to know what to confess ? Surely we need only to remember St. Paul was writing for all times, not only for the first disciples ; and how sorely we need his instructions still as well as the greater instructions of our Divine Lord Who gave to St. Paul the fundamental principles upon which he bases all his arguments !

BEFORE A CRUCIFIX

THINK of the Crown of Thorns pressing upon the Sacred Brow of our Lord. Each thorn may represent

a thought of evil, secretly harboured but never allowed to be known. The thoughts of God towards us are *"Thoughts of Peace and not of evil."* The Mind of Christ was a clear pool of crystal purity, wherein nothing harmful could ever be seen: *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."* What have I thought this day?

Gaze at those Eyes weighted with the drops of Blood falling from the Sacred Brow. *"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil."* Yet those Eyes have searched me as they "looked upon" Peter, when have they looked upon me with the love that has been wounded by my denial of Grace? I may not have denied Him in His Person, but have I denied His Grace within my soul—His Voice within my heart? Have the eyes which I have consecrated to Him looked upon evil? And am I therefore ashamed to meet His Gaze with the same look as I have looked upon that which is most abhorrent to Him?

The Sacred Lips are folded in silence which is only broken by a few brief words. Hours of silence, moments of speech! I read there the love which never complains, the charity which never condemns, the anguish which never utters a cry. The glorious strength which reposes its need upon God and God alone. Think of the impatient, complaining, frivolous words which escape my lips. The craving for human sympathy which leads me to indulgent self-pity, in pouring forth my trials to others. The lack of self-restraint which would teach me to listen when others speak, and guard with wisdom every word I utter.

The Hands pierced by the nails which hold them

to the Cross, are the Hands which were so often stretched in Blessing, in healing, and in succour. Sin has nullified their power. My sin has thwarted His Divine purpose for me. "The Right Hand of the Lord" could not act on my behalf. Neither can He work His works through me to-day if I am nailing His Hands to the Cross. How is my sin frustrating my mission to witness for Jesus in works of love and mercy? Am I needing help myself instead of stretching forth a saving hand to others? Am I rendering my life powerless through the nails of sin? It is Jesus Whom I am not making known; for "*if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*"

The Sacred Feet which walked this world according to the Will of God are fastened now by sin, so that they can walk no more. "Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O my God." Now He can manifest that Will in the human life no longer, for sin has checked the Footsteps of the Son of Man. Sin hinders us from vocation. The Will of God for my life was there, a perfect purpose whether known or unknown to me. Every separate act of self-choosing, or rebellion against His highest purpose for me, hinders me from receiving the highest possibility of my vocation. Let me search and see to-day whether I have failed in making any effort to choose the highest, because of self-love and the pride of self-choice. "*Lo, I—also I, come to do Thy Will, O my God, Yea I am content to do it.*"

His Sacred Form hangs stripped upon the Cross. Torn from those garments of purity, which enfolded Him in raiments of righteousness. He suffered shame for me who so often have known no shame. I who am one with the Bride of Christ, have fallen

from the perfect purity and modesty of the Bride-soul and in this have helped to strip the coverings from His Sacred Humanity.

Poverty is also depicted there in the utter stripping of all material things. He Who had no home had at least a poor raiment to clothe Himself, yet now that is taken from Him and He is as poor as the dead. What am I clinging to in luxury and needless things? Am I wrapping my life round with material goods that I shall have to leave behind me in the end? Can I go forth with Him free from all the trammels of the things which I do not really need, but which I cannot bring myself to do without? Let me count what I am holding that others do not have, while they lack necessities that to me are only a matter of course.

The Wound to the Sacred Heart! The thrust that slays love in the soul that deals it. In this loveless world, perfect love was born, and all the manifestations of Divine Love set free in the world; but sin could not bear love, neither could it exist where the other was possible. So the Sacred Heart was pierced: yet the Stream of Love and Grace was set free for those who willed to be saved. If my life is loveless, is it not due to my wounding of the Sacred Heart? In all my thoughts, words, and actions any breath of unlove is really directed against His Divine Heart. Let me gaze upon that Wound, and judge my conduct by that awful evidence of the lovelessness of my life.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to consider the subject of the use of the Sacrament of Absolution from all the most necessary and practical points of view, and in completing this short study we feel that the appeal of Love is the word we would sooner finish on than any other. After all, our greatest blessings are not so much to be argued about as known. All that we value most in our faith is passed on not so much by intellectual conviction as by living experience. When we know what has been wrought in another soul we are attracted to test its great value for ourselves, and this attitude of mind does not minimize the intellectual fact that in all matters of the Catholic Faith conviction should assuredly follow.

We need have no fear but that in following what is indisputably Catholic Tradition we shall find nothing but a greater richness and development in our spiritual life. Why should we argue by the way when a path is clearly marked out by the footsteps of the Saints? The Catholic Church is not merely that which commends itself to us as the first among many Churches. We who are her children may rest in the assurance that she has been born of God, from that stream of Grace and Forgiveness which flowed from the Sacred Heart of our Lord. He Who gave her birth has maintained her Life even through periods

when it was most threatened by heresy. God the Holy Ghost has never ceased to breathe into her the breath of God. All that doctrine which still lives as it has ever lived, emanating from the Heart of the Church, reaches us in a stream of mercy and grace. Why do we hesitate to believe, that we can only find in the Way of the Cross our ultimate Crown, whether of present experience and conviction, or in the fullness of our ultimate redemption?

"Oh, taste and see how gracious the Lord is!" and find for ourselves that in His very provision for the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the soul to grace there is for us a further revelation of His great and exceeding Love.

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Restoration to the sacred heart

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